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what it means TO BE A COMMUNIST

HENRY WINSTON

INTRODUCTION

The Foley Square trial and the McCarran Act have brought many questions about the internal life of the Communist Party to the attention of the general public. What is the real truth about the Party's attitude toward its individual members? How does it approach the problem of their education? How does it select and train leaders?

According to those who seek to destroy the Bill of Rights, on the ground that there is "no other way" to save our country from a fictitious "Communist conspiracy," the vanguard party of the American working class is a "training school for saboteurs and spies."

We can think of no more effective way to nail this Hitlerite Big Lie than by giving wide distribution to that section of Henry Winston's report to the 15th National Convention of the Communist Party which deals with the training of Communist cadres.

For here the National Organization Secretary of the Party comes to grips with key questions of Communist concepts of personal integrity, loyalty to and confidence in the working class, and the relations between membership and leadership which are at the heart of all the Party's concern for the ideological development of its individual members.

Henry Winston's vivid portrait of a certain Communist who followed the step-by-step course to personal corruption and class betrayal is an object lesson of concern to all workers, non-Communist as well as Communist. It dramatizes the high standards of devotion to the workers and common people, of ceaseless struggle against Big Business ideology and influence, which the Communist Party seeks to instill in all its members and followers.

In making this portion of the 15th National Convention Proceedings available in pamphlet form, we believe that it will be of invaluable use not only to all Communists but also to many non-Communist shop workers and fighters for peace, who seek to learn the truth about the Communist Party.

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I. People—The Most Valuable Capital

In the face of the unprecedented attacks by Big Business reaction, our Party members have fought courageously and won the respect of hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the country. Communists have manned picketlines in the face of growing terror. They have led successful united front actions against the Peekskill mobsters. Mothers with babes in arms have led united front actions for outlawing the atom bomb and for seating People's China in the U.N. In meeting halls and on street corners, actions have been organized to defend peace, to fight for U.S.-Soviet collaboration, to defeat the McCarran Bill, to repeal Taft-Hartley, and stop police killings of Negro men and women. Communists have fought for the people's rights to assemble and voice their opinions.

On every front Communist leaders of groups and clubs, section and county organizations, as well as the leaders of our State and National Committees, have defended courageously the democratic liberties of the American people against the threat of war and fascism and have waged a tireless and vigorous struggle for peace. Our Party has stood up, with the membership rallying as one.

It became necessary to readjust the organization of our Party so that it could more effectively influence and organize the masses of working people. We had to break down the clubs of our Party into smaller ones. This has resulted in a mass expansion of cadres leading the basic Party organization. Hundreds and hundreds of new people have for the first time assumed posts of leadership at the head of our smaller clubs.

This poses in a new way the need for unfolding a cadre

training program. When we speak of cadre training, we do not have in mind any idea of learning by rote. The first element in a cadre training program must be the active involvement of leadership and membership in the struggles of the working class, and this must be based upon a mastery of our Party's policies. But to master these policies our cadre must be politically and organizationally integrated in the life of the Party, and fully involved in the formulation of policies and in the fight for their execution.

The first element in cadre training and development is the political relationship of leadership to membership, based on the involvement of clubs in the formulation of policy, and on the fight for the execution of those policies through systematic political checkup. This becomes very vital for us today, when a new cadre is blossoming forth.

INTEGRATION OF CADRES NEEDED

We should realize that we have not succeeded in integrating both the new and the old cadres on all levels of leadership. Let me cite an instance:

Here is a shop worker, a jewel in our Party, a comrade who has spent more than twenty-five years in the movement. She works during the day. She comes from work directly to the office, eager to participate in discussions and find out what is new, so as to give more effective leadership among the workers in her industry. But a number of policy and tactical questions have already been discussed during the day. When this comrade comes in, there is no disposition to discuss questions already settled. There is no attempt to readjust schedules of the full-timers in order to assure the contribution of this comrade who comes fresh from the shop. This particular situation goes on for more than six weeks.

Finally, the comrade comes to the conclusion that you have to be a "glib" talker or "know someone" in order to be able to break through and make a contribution.

Another case: I received a letter from a woman comrade

who appealed to me to intervene. She wrote: "I have no assignment in these days, after 28 years in the movement. I was released from my last assignment and told that I would be given a new task in a few days. Three weeks have passed and I have not heard from the State organization. I hate to be idle in this period."

If we look around, we will find many cadres, who pioneered in the building of our Party anxious to be active in political and organizational work now. But these comrades have not been placed. Perhaps many such older comrades cannot keep the same pace as the younger ones, but then, a fast pace is not the only element we need today.

The fight to blend the old and the new presents itself as a must for our Party. This valuable capital must be made the most of so that the younger cadres can learn from the old, and the older cadres can learn from the new.

The training of cadres also requires a struggle against Right-opportunist and "Left"-sectarian tendencies. Under the pressure of enemy blows, there will be casualties, and we should not be taken by surprise. But lying at the bottom of such casualties are bourgeois influences which have captured those individuals and shaken their confidence in the working class.

II. Down the Road to Betrayal

Let me give you an example of one such individual, as reported by one comrade whom we will call John Daniels.

He is a man who reads Lenin and considers himself a man of principle—a Communist in the true sense. In the days of open-shop terror, he started out as a worker, a rank-and-file Communist. He had to build his union through "underground" groups of workers, starting from scratch in an unorganized field. The trust he worked for was merciless. It maintained a company union and tolerated no independent organization. After many struggles in the early '30's, finally in '36 and '37, with the upsurge of labor in this country, his union arrived.

It gained recognition, broke the company union, established itself. Naturally, he found himself in the top leadership of the union.

Times were such that many less experienced and conscientious than he were able to build unions because the masses were clamouring for organization. Numerous were the Communists who had built union organization in shop after shop, during that period. Yet he began to attribute the success of his union to his own genius. Less and less he came to depend on his Party club. He merely took it for granted that in every department where there was a Party member the interests of the union would be well cared for.

Then, little by little, he began to see the Party club in a new light. He found he could do without the Party members very nicely. Every now and then he needed them when he had to win an election. But otherwise, the club was pretty much of a nuisance. In the old days, he had looked at his comrades and had seen great courage under the most difficult conditions, absolute dependability, native wisdom, self-sacrifice and devotion. He now saw different traits among them. They seemed inarticulate, had little finesse, sometimes didn't agree with him and gave their first loyalty to the defense of the workers' interests. When he wanted advice now, he could get it from "better brains." He believed that to a large extent the Party relied on him for a correct policy in the union. He did not see the need for a mass Party in the industry, because, said he, the union leadership is more capable, more effective in bringing the policies of the Party to the workers.

In the union he made smart moves. He had a good lawyer. He got gains for the workers without much difficulty and with little struggle. Sometimes, it was not even necessary to mobilize the workers in action to back up the negotiations. The brief was filed, the arguments were made around the table. Things were going fine. He was in the mainstream—not only in the labor movement, but generally. Mrs. Roosevelt invited him to lunch with her now and then. And life

was good. There were problems, difficulties, but if he was on the ball and shrewd enough, he could maneuver.

LOSES COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE

He naturally began to lose Communist perspective. He began to get flabby. Suddenly—*boom!* The bourgeoisie launched a ferocious drive against the labor movement. Somehow, the smart negotiations no longer worked. They didn't produce. He could get practically nothing from the companies except through a real fight. The reactionary drive, supported by Social-Democracy and other company agents, began to make inroads among the membership. A new alignment took place in the labor movement. Left-Center unity was broken. And he not only had to face the attacks of the trusts, but also the C.I.O. leadership – the Murrays and Reuthers. The A.C.T.U. began to play a role and challenge his leadership. He had to deliver the bacon if he was to retain the leadership of the union.

In the meantime, the old militancy of the union has been dulled. The Party organization has been weakened. The old type of union organizer who built the union when the going was tough has been retrained into a Philadelphia lawyer or has been changed altogether. Now our man faces a difficult problem. What to do?

Mind you, this guy is not merely trying to hold on to his job—at least, not consciously. He is really very much worried about the danger of his own and the Party's isolation from the masses. He must avoid that at all costs. In the early days he knew that workers got nothing without a fight. Though he faced the powerful trust and a company union, though he looked at the workers and saw inertia, disunity and backwardness, yet he knew that "there was gold in them thar hills."

His whole life and work in those early days was based on the fact that he relied on the workers. He called on them to overcome their disunity. He aroused their courage, called for self-sacrifice, knew that eventually it would be forth-

coming. He had unbounded faith in eventual victory. In fact, that was what gave him the courage to withstand poverty and starvation, police clubs and injunctions. He was not afraid of any isolation because he considered an attack on him by a labor faker as the greatest tribute. He built his cadres from among the workers. And as long as he had the respect of the workers, he felt he was anything but isolated.

SEES ONLY POWER OF ENEMIES

Now, in a new situation, he found a great deal of fat around his political mid-section. Now, all he sees is the ignorance of the workers, their disunity, their reluctance to lose their jobs. They don't understand. And he doesn't feel he can make them understand. Yet, they expect him to get something for them. He is convinced they are not going to fight. Above all, he sees the power of the enemy. He can see no way of breaking that power to force even the slightest concession. The only way to get concessions is through some deal. But that is no longer easy, either. One way is to join the Murrays and Careys and then life will be much easier.

But he is a "man with a conscience." He hates a rat. He therefore sees no way out, has no perspective, and loses his bearings completely. He begins to rationalize.

After all, Socialism is clearly not on the order of the day. So what is wrong with leaving the future to the future and dealing today with the problems of today, giving honest, conscientious leadership to the workers on economic issues and leaving political questions to the Party?

And what is this honest, conscientious leadership? It turns out to be: Get anything you can that the company is willing to give. Get anything you can get without a fight and with no politics. Well, perhaps that will include support to the Marshall Plan, the U.S. invasion of Korea, and support for anything Murray orders you to support—because refusal to accept any part of C.I.O. policy means bringing politics into the union.

RATIONALIZATION FOR BETRAYAL

To console his conscience he needs an elaborate rationalization, so that he may go down the road of betrayal and still look in the mirror. So he says: The Communist Parties in Europe are really doing a fine job. I am proud of them. But the American Communist Party—that's a horse of a different color. Later, he says: I accept the leadership of the Party on general policy, but on specific tactics and propositions, why that's interference. The Party is trying to run the union for me. Then he adds: I fully recognize the role of the Party, especially on general policy. The trouble is that at present we have a Party leadership that is inexperienced and is steering a wrong course. I am sure the Party will correct itself in time. But in the meantime, I am not going to lose my position of leadership in the union.

Pretty soon he says: What is wrong with making a deal with O'Dwyer on the 10-cent fare if that is the only way to improve the conditions of the workers. After all, the business of the union is to get wage increases. Let the Communist Party or the A.L.P. handle the high cost of living. A day comes when he also says: What is wrong with doing a little Red-baiting. It's only lip-service. Billions of reactionary words are poured into the minds of the workers every day. Will my few words make any difference? There is so much warmongering propaganda that my weak criticism of the Soviet Union couldn't possibly make a difference. Yet it may win the election or save the union.

He now finds that some of his best friends of the earlier days are cooling off to him. He seeks new allies. To please his new allies he begins to remove from positions of leadership some of his old stalwarts. And for the same reason, it becomes necessary to ease some rank-and-file militants out of their jobs and, in fact, out of the industry. He begins to make peace with Murray. But that's not simple, either. How do Mr. Murray and J. Edgar Hoover know this is not another "Communist trick"? Well, there is but one way to convince them—and now he denounces the Party and its work. As a token of

good faith, he names a few names. From here on out, the road all the way down is clear.

This is the evolution of a betrayal of working-class trust.

III. Communists—People of a Special Mold

I cite this example because there have been others who deserted the struggle in the past two years. And the lesson to be drawn is the need for a merciless struggle for Communist methods and practices and against every manifestation of opportunism—a merciless struggle to enhance the strength of the workers in the industries, involving them democratically in the struggle of their unions, inspiring them, fighting to create confidence in the working class, not only on the economic front, but in the general democratic struggle. And all this will, at the same time, make it more difficult for the workers to be taken in by charlatans.

This example is important for us because it raises many serious questions in the fight for a correct cadre policy. Chief among them is the need to guarantee that the closest ties are maintained between leadership and membership, and with the mass of the workers. When these ties are broken, then it is impossible to continue in the position of leadership. For the job of leadership is not alone to guide and direct the work of others—it is also necessary to learn from others—to learn from the members and the workers. Separation from the membership, from the workers, can result only in bureaucracy, in placing oneself above the Party, above the interests of the workers.

Secondly, it is necessary to show the utmost vigilance in noting and checking the corrupting influences of our present-day society on the thinking and living habits of some comrades, to expose these influences in the interest of the comrade himself, but primarily in the interest of the Party as a whole.

Thirdly, it is necessary to eliminate all self-complacency, cliquish and "family circle" atmosphere in relationships between Communists, especially rooting out all elements of

false praise and flattery. For, as one wise comrade put it, flattery corrupts not only the flattered but the flatterer as well. Of course, we must continue to guard against any annihilating type of criticism which undermines the confidence and abilities of our cadres, which creates subjective personal reactions hindering their growth and development.

Fourthly, it is necessary to apply criticism and self-criticism in the moulding of Party cadres. Criticism and self criticism are not to be applied on occasions—on holidays—so to speak. They must be applied daily, as indispensable weapons in the examination of the work of our Party and the individual cadres, with the aim of isolating our errors and weaknesses, and helping comrades overcome their weaknesses and mistakes at the time the mistakes are committed. Only by learning the lessons from mistakes can our Party cadres develop Communist methods, habits, and qualities of leadership.

Finally, only those leaders can withstand the pressures of enemy ideology, can relentlessly fight against opportunism in practice, who constantly strive to master Marxism-Leninism —the great liberating science of the working class, which alone gives us the confidence in the inevitable victory of the working class, headed by its Communist vanguard. Those who see only backwardness, immobility and disunity in the working class, are bound to ignore the essential truth that it is the working class that possesses all the necessary qualities to bring about the transformation of society, and build Socialism.

In connection with a sound cadre policy, our Party must undertake an intensive campaign of schools, classes and the organization of self-study for the whole of our membership. We need week-end classes, one-week classes, two-week classes, full-time schools of longer duration, with the aim of involving the entire Party. These classes should be based upon a study of our Party's policies, beginning with this Convention, and should be undertaken to deepen the political line of our Party on the basis of the classics of our movement. This should not be a short-time campaign but a permanent part of the training and development of Communist leadership.

Basic to the realization of the line we formulate here is the need for perfecting our style of work—of mastering the Leninist method of work. This requires a conscious development of Communist zeal as against slovenly routinism in our work. It means further to develop collective work as against individualistic petty-bourgeois habits and methods of work.

The fight for a Leninist style of work also requires the widest development of criticism and self-criticism, as a constant practice in the work of the Party. Such criticism and self-criticism should include a political check-up on our decisions to help eliminate sloppy methods and liberalism in our work, and assure that decisions are not honored in the breach, but in the observance.

Moreover, this new style of work envisages the fight for the purity of our Party, the weeding out of unhealthy anti-Party elements on the basis of vigilance, which is possible only if the entire Party is involved in this struggle. These are the main elements that must be developed insofar as style of work is concerned.

However, we can realize this only if a struggle is waged against bureaucratic methods of work.

IV. Profile of a Bureaucrat

I should like to give this Convention the physiognomy of a bureaucrat.

When you try to tell the bureaucrat something he listens carefully for about fifteen seconds. Then he proceeds to tell *you*. Sometimes, he appears to hear you through with the closest attention. But his mind is really off on more important matters. And when you finish, the bureaucrat neatly puts you in your place by saying of your views: "That's obvious."

The bureaucrat really believes that collective discussions are a waste of time because, since he already knows all the answers anyway, he could really spend his time better in

other ways. Sometimes he welcomes discussions—not so much to develop a collective opinion, as to develop a collective audience for his own views. Or, when he listens to others in a discussion, it is not so that he may learn from others, but so that he may tell others what is wrong with them. Often, the bureaucrat considers informal discussion an intrusion on his private thoughts and brushes them aside with the proposal that: "We must have a formal discussion of that." To the bureaucrat, collective work is restricted to formal discussion. One thing that escapes him entirely is that the basis of all collective work is the collection of the views of the masses, is collective work with the masses.

Nothing is easier for the bureaucrat than to figure out what the workers should be struggling for. If they don't struggle, when and how he believes they should, he comes to the conclusion either that there is something wrong with the workers, or there is something wrong with those who are supposed to carry out his directives among the workers, or there is just something wrong with everybody except himself.

BUREAUCRAT IGNORES THE WORKERS

He doesn't understand that the fundamental thing is to know what disturbs the workers—to know around what issues the workers are ready to struggle, and that his job is to help them in their struggle, to help them find the channel for expressing their needs and desires. He fails to realize that his job is to learn from the workers not only about the issues, but even the organizational forms that are appropriate. To help infuse that struggle with a Marxist content, not to impose his preconceived concept of the struggle upon them. And through all of these to bring leadership and to win leadership.

The bureaucrat believes that the use of book terminology marks him as a veteran. He does not worry whether anybody understands him when he talks. He is afraid that if he talks to a new member in terms that the new member will under-

stand, he himself might be mistaken for an equal of that new member. It never occurs to him that a new member may know much more than he does about the masses from whom he has long been isolated. And, of course, it never occurs to him that he himself has as much to learn from the masses.

When the bureaucrat speaks or writes for an audience, he is less concerned with how his messages may help them, than with how his words may impress his audience with his own worth. The bureaucrat resents having his work criticized; if he ever makes mistakes, they are usually minor ones, of little importance. His main mistake, he usually believes, is in not having caught the mistakes of others quickly enough. He believes he is too tolerant of the weaknesses of others and that others are too intolerant of his own weaknesses.

The bureaucrat either ignores organizational problems entirely, or believes the answer to every problem is solely organizational.

Since his problem never gets solved, he will continue to revise his previous organizational answers, ignoring the fact that the political answers must come first, and that these dictate the proper organizational forms.

When the bureaucrat finds himself catapulted among the masses by force of circumstances, he believes he will be instantly recognized as God's gift to the working man. The more insulated he has been from the masses in the past, the more the masses will appreciate the fact that he is coming among them *now*, and the more readily will they greet every word of wisdom issuing from his lips.

BUREAUCRAT REFUSES TO WORK COLLECTIVELY

Among the masses, the bureaucrat exhibits the same traits as he does in the Party organization. In moments of crisis or emergency, he feels that collective work can only hold up getting things done. In a strike, for example, he feels that meetings of a strike committee, or a Party club, interfere with all the work that has to be done. The time for collective dis-

cussion is after the emergency is over, when there is the leisure to discuss collectively how to have avoided the mistakes that collective work at the time might have prevented.

The bureaucrat in the union sees no grievances among the workers, either because he has none himself, or because the settling of grievances can have an unsettling effect upon his own comfortable routine. He views himself as someone who services the union, like a doctor, instead of a leader of struggle.

Of course, the perfect bureaucrat whom I have here sketched does not exist. In fact, he could not exist because he would burst from his own self-importance and evaporate into thin air. But little pieces of him, of varying size, do exist in almost everyone of us. And to the extent that they do, they act as a barrier to the realization of the mass line this convention is formulating.

This means that in the realization of our Party's policies there must be put in practice a method of work in which leadership has direct contact with the basic organs of the Party, and in the first place, the shop club of the Party. The implementation of this line means that every leader of our National Committee, of the State Committees, of County and Section Committees, must develop an intimate relation with, must thoroughly master the problems of, and give concrete guidance to, our comrades working in the shops.

The present period requires that we depend less and less upon full-time cadre, but give greater weight to volunteer, non-full-time workers on the job, assisting them in their development, helping in their training for leadership among the masses. The point that we are making is the need to develop the maximum initiative from below in our clubs, to enable them to make policy decisions as well as carry out their execution. The underlying principle here involved is indestructible confidence in the working class—in the basic proletarian members and cadres of our Party.

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